

independent media and administration propaganda, some agencies have produced prepackaged news stories designed to be indistinguishable from news stories produced by free market news outlets.

According to the Government Accountability Office, the GAO, which is an arm of the Congress, in an opinion dated February 17, 2005, the administration has violated the prohibition on publicity and propaganda. In a memorandum sent to executive branch agencies, the GAO stated:

During the past year, we found that several prepackaged news stories produced and distributed by certain Government agencies violated this provision.

So very simply, according to the GAO, the administration broke the law. The GAO specifically cited the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Department of Health and Human Services for violating the antipropaganda law. But these are not the only agencies pretending to be a credible news outlet.

On March 13, 2005, the New York Times wrote about the administration's approach in an article entitled "Under Bush a New Age of Prepackaged TV News."

I ask unanimous consent that the entire article be printed in the RECORD following my remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(See exhibit 1.)

Mr. BYRD. The Times article spotlighted three new segments that each looked the same as any other 90-second segment on the local news. But these are not new. The Federal Government produced all three of these. The Times told of a news segment produced by the State Department featuring a jubilant Iraqi American telling a news crew in Kansas City: "Thank you, Bush. Thank you, USA."

The Department of Homeland Security apparently produced a so-called news report on the creation of the Transportation Security Administration. The reporter called the establishment of TSA "one of the most remarkable campaigns in aviation history." But what the American people, the viewers, did not know was that the so-called reporter was actually a public relations professional working under a false name for the Transportation Security Administration. How about that?

A third segment broadcast in January was based on a news report produced by the Department of Agriculture. The Agriculture Department apparently employs two full-time people to act—listen now—to act as reporters. They travel the country and create their own so-called news, distributing their work via satellite and mail, always pushing the White House line.

What are things coming to?

In the January report, these U.S. Department of Agriculture employees, claiming to be independent journalists,

called President Bush "the best envoy in the world."

I am not here to argue whether George W. Bush is America's best envoy to the world, but I would rather leave that discussion to independent analysts, not to administration employees or on-the-payroll journalists pushing the White House line.

Yes, the administration should explain its ideas and positions to the American people. No one argues that fact. Educating the public about issues affecting their lives is an essential role of the Government. But the administration should not engage in a blatant manipulation of the news media. Leave the work of manipulation to the Rush Limbaughs of the world. Keep the job of Government focused on the people. Manufacturing propaganda is a blatant misuse of taxpayer dollars, and it is your money, your money, Mr. and Mrs. Taxpayer.

The administration has disputed GAO's views. The administration takes the view that it is OK to mask the source as long as the ads are "purely informational."

The White House Office of Management and Budget, with the support of the Justice Department, went so far as to issue a memorandum to agency heads dated March 11, 2005, specifically contradicting the conclusions of the Government Accountability Office. The Justice Department concluded that the Government Accountability Office's:

... conclusion fails to recognize the distinction between covert propaganda and purely informational Video News Reports, which do not constitute propaganda within the common meaning of the term and therefore are not subject to the appropriations restriction.

If paying national columnists and talk show hosts, faking news segments, hiring actors to pretend to be reporters "do not constitute propaganda," what does? What does constitute propaganda? It is time for the administration to back off.

We, the American people, trust the media to provide us with independent sources of information, not biased news stories produced by the administration at the taxpayers' expense. It is time for the White House to be upfront with the American people: no propaganda, no manipulation of the press. The administration should tell the people its position on issues, yes, but should do so honorably and without such deliberate manipulation of the free press. Propaganda efforts such as these are not the stuff for a Republic such as ours. The American people must be able to rely on the independence of the news media. The constitutionally guaranteed freedom of the press is not for sale. The country must know that reporters—real reporters—are presenting facts honestly, presenting facts fairly, presenting facts without bias. Democracy should not be built on deception.

Just yesterday, the Federal Communications Commission, on a unanimous vote—on a unanimous vote of 4 to 0—

approved a public notice that directs—that directs, hear me—that directs television broadcasters to disclose to viewers the origin of video news releases produced by the Government or corporations when the material runs on the public airwaves. The Commission acknowledged the critical role that broadcast licensees and cable operators play in providing information to the audiences they serve. This information is an important component of a well-functioning democracy. Along with this role comes a responsibility, the responsibility that licensees and operators make the sponsorship announcements required by the foregoing rule and obtain the information from all pertinent individuals necessary for them to do so. The public notice goes on to stress that the Commission may impose sanctions, including fines, including imprisonment, for failure to comply with the ruling. You better watch out. So the FCC, by a unanimous vote, I say, made clear, crystal clear, as clear as the noonday Sun in a cloudless sky, what their rules are. They made clear to the broadcasters what their rules are.

Now Congress should make clear what the rules are for Federal agencies. Just yesterday, the Federal Communications Commission, on a unanimous vote, 4 to 0, approved this public notice, I am saying it again, that directs television broadcasters to disclose to viewers the origin of video news releases produced by the Government or corporations—I will say this a third time—when the material runs on the public airwaves.

So this is a warning. We, in the Congress, ought to do our best in support of the ruling and to enforce it.

Let me say now that my amendment prevents any agency from using taxpayer dollars to produce or distribute prepackaged news stories intended to be viewed, intended to be heard, intended to be read, which do not clearly identify the so-called news was created by a Federal agency or funded with taxpayer dollars. That is plain common sense.

I urge Senators to back the law that we, Congress, have passed each year since 1951:

No part of any appropriation contained in this or any other Act shall be used for publicity or propaganda purposes within the United States not heretofore authorized by Congress.

Back it up. My amendment simply makes it clear, I say again, that Congress does mean what Congress says. I urge adoption of the amendment. I will yield the floor, but I want to send my amendment to the desk.

EXHIBIT 1

[From the New York Times, Mar. 13, 2005]
UNDER BUSH, A NEW AGE OF PREPACKAGED TV NEWS

(By David Barstow and Robin Stein)

It is the kind of TV news coverage every president covets.

"Thank you, Bush. Thank you, U.S.A.," a jubilant Iraqi-American told a camera crew